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THE POWER OF
RED MICHAEL
AND OTHER BALLADS
BY FREDERICK LANGBRIDGE



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Jau. 1926

THE POWER OF
RED MICHAEL
AND OTHER BALLADS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Sent Back by the Angels (4th edition).
The Scales of Heaven.
Ballads and Legends.
A Cluster of Quiet Thoughts (5th edition).
Clear Waters (2nd edition).
Little Tapers.
The Distant Lights.
The Peaks of Proud Desire.
Ballads of the Brave (3rd edition).

THE POWER OF RED MICHAEL AND OTHER BALLADS

BY FREDERICK LANGBRIDGE
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PREFACE

There is an exquisite island, which Keats visited now and again: where Mr. Yeats has built himself a cabin, with nine bean rows, and a hive for the honey bee. Sometimes I dream of a summer on that island, but the boatmen shake their heads if you ask to be landed there.

Somewhere beyond that island stretches a realm of painted shadows. Coleridge, de Quincey, Mangan, Poe have travelled a little of the country. They all bribed their way, I fear, with the same costly syrup of dreams. I have seen that realm lying like a purple cloud upon the sea, but it was far out of my course.

North of that land, a great way north, there rises an iron coast almost unexplored. It darkens on that sea where, sailing on Christmas Day, Brandon had speech with Judas Iscariot, sitting on the berg in his one-day Paradise, with the fiends clamouring in the air and the fishes hungering for his feet.

It is a region stark and sheer, dim, forbidden, peopled by evil ghosts. Almost I could wish I never had seen its dreadful gulleys, its glimmering, ghastly peaks. There, however, I have wandered awhile, and these ballads are the things I have brought back.

St. John's Rectory, Limerick,
April 7th, 1909.

TO

HENRY ADKINS

IN MEMORY OF YEARS, ROADS, AND THOUGHTS
TRAVELED TOGETHER

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THE POWER OF RED MICHAEL

Her arms were flung like tossing boughs :

 Her fierce eyes burnt the air :

“ Dying—dying—dying,” she scream’d,

 “ And he will meet me there.”

The priest bent over the workhouse bed :

 The sick sat up to stare :

“ Lie back—lie still,” he said, “ poor woman,

 And gather your soul in prayer.”

He laid her head on the hard pillow :

 The fire of her cheeks went white :

Only her eyes like a chain’d dog’s

 Shifted an opal light.

“ Now speak,” he said, and the woman spoke :

 “ Red Michael—it was he :

A man that was wed to kin of mine

 To offer love to me !

“ To offer love to a woman promised,

 And promised to his kin—

A woman that would be call’d in chapel

 As soon as the oats were in !

THE POWER OF RED MICHAEL

“ I was filling my crock at St. Bride’s Well,
The last week o’ the drouth :
He lifted me up as the crock guggled,
And kiss’d me full on the mouth.

“ He bruised my lips with four kisses :
He laugh’d and let me go :
I drove my knuckles against his cheek,
And cut them with the blow.

“ With that he caught me by the wrist—
The bone still bears the sign :
‘ A little fool of a wench,’ he said,
‘ To set her will to mine !

“ ‘ If I want a thing I have a thing—
I have it far or nigh :
I’d lift you out of your chair in Heaven,
If God Himself sat by.’

“ He slapp’d my face, and laugh’d, and went :
I stood and could not speak :
But over the fields in Michael’s traps
I heard a rabbit shriek.

“ Ten days from that I knelt in the Chapel,
And heard my trampling heart,
And look’d to feel a red-hair’d hand
Striking our hands apart.

THE POWER OF RED MICHAEL

“ My man he took me in his arms,
And bade me never cry :
I shriek’d—I shriek’d—I struggled and shriek’d—
And dared not tell him why.

“ Next day I pass’d where Michael lounged :
‘ Ah, Wilson’s wife,’ said he,
“ The sure man is the patient man—
Haste never troubled me.

“ I’m running out a length of line
To give my fish her play,
But never think, my silver salmon,
To splash and break away.

“ You’re on the hook, my silver salmon :
You’re limed, my golden bird :
In frock or smock you’ll come to Michael,
When Michael speaks the word.’

“ He made a step : ‘ I’ll speak it now : ’
He turn’d and look’d to sea :
‘ Faith, no ! there’s water over the bar—
My mates are wanting me.’

“ I spat at him and leapt away—
His laughter stung my cheek :
‘ Thro’ that wild night I burnt a light,
And heard the pebbles shriek.

THE POWER OF RED MICHAEL

“ And in the drift and scud of sleep
I felt black water break,
And swung thro’ blinded Hells of sea
In arms like a twining snake.

“ No need—no need—to ask the news
That blew about the town :
At four o’ the clock on the Horse Rock
Michael’s lugger went down.”

The priest bent over the workhouse bed,
And gave the woman her drink :
Her eyes came out like a leash of lamps,
Her face began to shrink.

“ I knew the man would never die
As a quiet Christian dies :
Not all the seas that roll’d him round
Could shut Red Michael’s eyes.

“ I saw them loose the coffin ropes—
The boards were light and thin :
Five feet of sand and a slip of deal
To keep Red Michael in !

“ I knew the man would have his will,
And, ere the night was thro’,
I felt that something waited and strove,
Something gather’d and grew.

THE POWER OF RED MICHAEL

“ I felt that something waned and waver’d,
 Something press’d and twined :
I saw the look in Wilson’s face
 Of a swimmer that seaweeds bind.

“ Something sank in Wilson’s face,
 And clutch’d, and strove to rise ;
Then all the light went down and out—
 Dead windows were his eyes.

“ His face was like an empty house
 That cannot smile or stare :
Then something swam and quiver’d up,
 And two strange lights were there.

“ Ah, what was a coffin, and what was a grave,
 And what was the Pit beneath ?
I knew the eyes that were lit in Hell
 And lighted the laughing teeth.

“ He bruised my lips with four kisses—
 I swoon’d in heart and brain :
When that my soul swam out of the dark
 The eyes were Wilson’s again.”

The white priest shook the dying woman
 Whose terror shook the bed :
“ Woman—woman—they buried the man :
 The grave shall keep its dead.

THE POWER OF RED MICHAEL

“ Dreadful woman, you hint at things
God dare not let you say ;
I tell you He will stop His ears
If you cry on Judgment Day.”

The woman thrust at something there
That waited out of sight :
The death was rattling in her throat
Like a corncrake in the night.

“ Lift up the crucifix,” she scream’d,
“ Lift up the saving sign :
Nothing but that can stand between
Red Michael’s soul and mine.

“ High—high—lift it high :
Show it strong and stark :”
The two mad stars leapt in her face,
Then death blew them dark.

The white priest set the window wide :
There came a chill blast,
And, like a curlew down the wind,
Two twining souls went past.

THE SOUL OF ANGÈLE

They stole away with soundless tread,
Leaving us two alone :
She lay, with the tapers at her head,
As carven of Parian stone :
“ She folds her sweet white wings,” I said,
“ Beside the great white Throne.

“ Why were you given to me—to me,
My wonderful white Angèle ?
Scarce human in your purity,
So exquisitely frail :
Thro’ the vase of your flesh I trembled to see
The perfumed soul exhale.

“ O love, I was made of an earthly clod,
And Heaven is hard to scale :
Wearily ever I grope and plod,
With thoughts that faint and fail :
Light thou my feet to the land of God,
My beautiful, bright Angèle.”

THE SOUL OF ANGÈLE

Then, while I sat and held her hand,
 Sleep wrapt me warm and well :
We two did stand in the heavenly land,
 Plucking the asphodel—
Hark ! what did stir ? a curl of her ?—
 Only a dead leaf fell.

That night again, when watching and pain
 Their opiate will did wreak,
I woke to hear some sound anear,
 Exceeding faint and weak :
A sound as when to the ears of men
 A voiceless thing would speak.

Long in the dark did I lie, and hark !
 I said, “ Her spaniel cried :
He roams, almost a homeless ghost,
 Since his dear lady died :
I will call him here, to make me cheer,
 And to sit at my bedside.”

I whistled, and he came to me,
 Dejectedly and slow :
Then in his kind eyes palpably
 I saw a horror grow :
He look'd at something I could not see,
 And tried to make me know.

THE SOUL OF ANGÈLE

Thenceforth no more he cross'd the floor,
Nor came the chamber nigh,
But in his sleep, when night was deep,
I heard him utter a cry
That seemed to loose some awful sluice
Beyond mortality.

One night I felt a presence there,
A waif, a thing forlorn :
Some drift, perchance, of an old despair,
Lost ere its soul was born :
Awhile it wove a mist on the air,
Then melted, quite outworn.

At length, when moonshine lit the room,
I saw the feeble thing—
A shape half lapsing into the gloom,
That faintly strove to cling,
Holding itself against the doom
Of utterly vanishing.

I sent my soul in strong control :
I made my will a hand :
I press'd, as you press to a clinging roll
The cobweb rays that expand :
I caught, as you bear by the floating hair
The leaden body to land.

THE SOUL OF ANGÈLE

The thing had substance now, and lo !
Some cold primeval dread
Crawl'd in the roots of my soul, to know
I communed with the dead :
My God ! what shape of woman or ape
Was crouching by the bed ?

What memory stirr'd in its foul grimace—
The human bestial thing ?
The mockery of what robe and lace
To its huddled shape did cling ?
“ Nay, God, I *will* not know the face—
That face it dares to bring.”

I shut the sense of eye and ear,
I pray'd as the drowning pray :
And ever nearer and more near
I felt it worm its way ;
And into my soul the meaning stole
Of that which it could not say.

“ Lean from above, O Lord of love :
Thy power shall yet avail :
Let not this ape profane the shape
Of thy white saint, Angèle :
Or strike me dead ere all be said,
And I believe the tale.”

THE SOUL OF ANGÈLE

It filter'd still thro' sense and will :
 Into my brain it stole :
As foul waves spread on waters dead,
 It slavered and slimed my soul :
“ Now over the face of the stars,” I said,
 “ The seas of Hell may roll.”

I tried to laugh the tale to scorn—
 The leprous tale was true :
It seem'd or ever the world was born
 The laughing devils knew :
“ Oh, lily frail, snow-white Angèle,
 In Hell your rank roots grew !

“ And he, the friend with whom I trod
 The steps of climbing years :
To whom I told, as one tells to God
 My virginal hopes and fears . . . ”
A laugh hard by, a gibber'd cry,
 Defiled my human ears.

I took my dirk of ancient work
 And sharpen'd it on the stone :
His house of right by day and night
 Was open to me as my own :
He woke with a start : I heard his heart :
 He saw me stand alone.

THE SOUL OF ANGÈLE

Half-raised in bed, some jest he said :
The laughter caught and died :
A mortal dread in blotches spread :
He gasped, "The woman lied" :
Under his chin the steel drove in ;
Gurgling a curse, he died.

The casement-shutter stood ajar :
No light was in the street,
But 'twixt the moon and a yellow star
I saw his spirit fleet :
What was the Thing, the whimpering Thing,
That clung about his feet ?

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

They whisper low of the wan lady
Whose heart some anguish tore :
They whisper low of the Grey Lady
Who walks the corridor.

Out of the left-hand room she comes,
At the time of the bat's flight :
She traverses the corridor
And vanishes at the right.

And he who sees the Grey Lady,
Pale and sad of cheer,
Wears a strange death on his face
Ere another year.

The new Squire was weak in health,
The tale was something grim :
When the new Squire came to Blackstone Chad
They kept the tale from him.

The men in the stables knew the tale,
The maids by the kitchen fire,
The Squire's wife and her bosom friend :
But they kept the tale from the Squire.

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

The Squire had laugh'd at ghostly traffic,
But now his health was low,
And Blackstone Chad is a lonely ridge,
Where great gales blow.

Blackstone Chad stands bitter and stark,
Half-way to Blackstone Pike,
And scarce a cottage chimney smokes
This side of Ribstone Dyke.

Lonely, lonely, bitter and lonely
Stands old Blackstone Chad :
There every wind has built a nest.
And all the winds are mad.

You look from misty pass to pass,
You meet a wrestling sky,
And you shall see within an hour
Three blackening storms go by.

A bitter place wherein to bide
Is the hall of Blackstone Chad :
One squire in the night went dumb with fright,
Two squires went moody mad.

So, when to the hall came the new Squire,
Who had dwelt oversea,
The word went round, " Finger on lip
About the Grey Lady."

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

They dwelt a year at Blackstone Chad :
A quiet year went by ;
And the Squire had grown to love the wind
And love the wrestling sky.

But the Squire's wife and her friend Mary
Would huddle round the fire :
They let the dour winds smite them pale
Because they loved the Squire.

They listen'd to the four great winds
That had their heart's desire :
They thought of the flitting Grey Lady,
And never told the Squire.

And when sweet Mary's mother died,
And Mary went away,
God knows what fears were the hearkening wife's
Betwixt the night and the day.

The Squire look'd out on Lady Day,
As day began to shut :
The mists moved up like a herd of ghosts :
He saw them shoulder and butt.

The four great winds came out together
And wrestled from hill to hill :
And yet he heard the twining bats
That squeal'd so high and shrill.

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

The Squire he pull'd the shutter to :
The turf glow'd clear and red :
" My book," he mutter'd, " My book of plays :
I left it overhead."

He took a candle in his hand,
His velvet cap he wore :
Slowly his feet went up the steps
That climb to the corridor.

Only once his footsteps halted—
Once he seem'd to stand :
In five score seconds he was back
With the playbook in his hand.

The Squire he took a pipe from the rack,
And puff'd till the bowl was red :
" Did Mary Blake come back last night ?
Is Mary here ? " he said.

The Squire's wife laid her scissors by :
" What talk," she said, " is that ?
You know I cannot take my eyes
From the chair where Mary sat.

" You know that Mary's far away
Among the Devon flowers,
And never may come back again
To this bleak ridge of ours."

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

“ This one,” he said, “ was pale like Mary—
That made me think of her :
I know that Mary reach’d her mother
Too late to minister.

“ But this was taller—and she wore
Her hair in other wise :
God ! did such sorrow ever call
Out of a woman’s eyes ?

“ ’Twas from the left-hand room she came :
Her steps were slow and light :
She traversed all the corridor
To the room upon the right.

“ I thought she had some word for me,
So steadfastly she came :
I touch’d her dress : I put it back
To shield it from the flame.”

The Squire’s wife was white as a mist :
She turn’d away her head :
She did not know the voice that came :
“ You fancy things,” she said.

“ And indeed who wills may fancy sights
In that grim corridor :
Did you fancy any fashion of dress
That the shadowy woman wore ? ”

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

“ Shadowy—shadowy,” answer’d the Squire :

“ How ill you understand !

Will a shadow scorch her gusty robe

At the candle in your hand ?

“ I take no heed of a woman’s dress :

I know not yours to-day :

Yet—now I make the vision stand—

Grey—a weary grey.”

The Squire’s wife turn’d and stirr’d the fire—

She heard the screaming gale :

She heard her heart like a hurried hammer

Driving a coffin nail.

The Squire he open’d his book of plays,

And set his glasses true :

He push’d his finger into his pipe,

Then turn’d a page or two.

“ I thought,” he said, “ my nerves were good,

Though strength I never could boast :

I thought few fools were fool enough

To show their eyes a ghost.

“ Yet I’ve fobb’d on mine a Grey Lady :

A prince of fools I am :

And yet, thank God, I’ve sense enough,

To scout the walking sham.

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

“ Thank God, although I’ve trick’d my eyes,
I feel no idiot fear :

Let the Grey Lady walk if she will—
All ghosts are welcome here.”

And so the Squire went his ways
As calmly as before,
And he would pace with musing face
The darken’d corridor.

No one knew of the Grey Lady—
Sad and pale of cheer,
She whose brings the evil death
Ere another year.

Only the pale wife by the fire
Thro’ the screaming gale
Heard her heart like a hurried hammer
Driving a coffin nail.

’Twas in the dusk of Lady Day
The apparition came ;
The year crept on and the year crept out
And all was just the same.

’Twas on the Eve of Lady Day
They found him on his bed,
The kind Squire, the gentle Squire,
Sitting stone dead.

THE GREY LADY OF BLACKSTONE CHAD

There on the Eve of Lady Day
He sat with his throat cut :
They buried him with open eyes :
His eyes will never shut.

THE BALLAD OF THE BITTER TREE

There grew a tree in Nazareth wood
Exceeding bitter and grim :
In the shape of a stunted man it stood,
Bow'd trunk and writhen limb.

'Twas dark with moss and ancient lore,
That tree of strange device :
Some thought ill angels carried it o'er
From ruin'd Paradise.

There had it stood from a nameless day
To daunt the whispering town :
Each soul did pray that tree away—
No hand would cut it down.

When Jesus ran at Mary's side,
And sang in childish glee,
Sudden He cried, (and the tears would glide)
“ God pity the sad old tree ! ”

And, when the tree did toss and fling,
And moan in the tempest's fit,
He would stretch His arms to the shaken thing,
As tho' to comfort it.

THE BALLAD OF THE BITTER TREE

And often in their shouting play
 He turn'd from comrades all :
“ Hearken ! ” He whisper'd : “ I must away :
 I hear the sad tree call.”

So did He grow to haunt the place,
 So, dreaming, there would sit,
And the shadows moving across His face
 Were dark words dimly writ.

Then on the calm days' even flow
 There broke the yearly stir,
And the tall boy Jesus now should go
 To keep the Passover.

The company was gather'd and ranged ;
 The colour'd kerchiefs flew ;
The long hymn rose ; loud on its close,
 Snoring, the ramshorns blew.

Then Mary turn'd in her saddle and spake,
 “ Son, Jesus—where is He ? ”
No sound old Joseph's lips did make,
 But he stared upon the tree.

In a night of its own the tree stood lone,
 Ring'd black against the sun,
And the arms of Jesus, darkly shown,
 And the tree's own arms were one.

THE BALLAD OF THE BITTER TREE

One bar of shade the stark arms made,
And one were body and bole,
And sounds did come like speech of the dumb,
With the groan of a grieving soul.

She spoke His name—He shudder'd and came :
Heavily on He trod,
And His eyes were words that none could frame
In some old doom of God.

So silently the years went by
Till Joseph was gather'd and gone,
And Jesus had call'd to His company
Peter and James and John.

He went about with loving eyes
That heal'd the waiting folk :
Yea, flower and bird, as some averr'd,
Gave heed to the things He spoke.

Jehovah wrapt in clouds of dread
He made a Father mild,
Laying His hand on the shining head
Of every village child.

And “ Yea, Amen,” said many then,
“ Spake not the Scripture aright,
‘ To Naphtali and the land thereby
Shall arise a marvellous light :

THE BALLAD OF THE BITTER TREE

“‘ A light shall arise to lighten the eyes
In sorrowful days to be ? ’—
It shineth now, as I avow,
In Jesus of Galilee.”

Then would He forth to preach the word
In many a distant town,
While talk did run of David’s Son,
And the King whom God should crown.

Yet on the night ere they must part
Mary no sleep might win,
Because of a fear that held her heart
And voices that call’d therein :

And, rising as soon as the day was clear,
In the open door she stood,
And saw the tree stand lone and drear
In the singing, shining wood.

In a night of its own the tree stood lone,
Ring’d black against the sun,
And the arms of Jesus, cross-wise thrown,
And the tree’s own arms were one.

One bar of shade the stark arms made,
And one were body and bole,
And sounds arose of lonely woes
At the root of the first man’s soul.

THE BALLAD OF THE BITTER TREE

She spoke His name—He shudder'd and came :
Slow thro' the dews He trod,
And His eyes were cloud and smouldering flame
From the shaken Mount of God.

Then gather'd He His company :
Down the white street they pass'd,
Peter for guide, and John at His side,
And soft-foot Judas last.

She watch'd them breast the little rise,
Then slowly turn'd her face :
Her heart beheld or ever her eyes—
The tree had quitted its place.

In the whispering wood where the tree had stood
There gaped an empty place,
Yet from the blue no light came thro'
On the dim forbidden space.

Then did it seem that on her dream
The angel burn'd again,
And, heavy and sore, there stirr'd once more
The woman's doom of pain.

Again she turn'd where the dust did roll :
It sank and left no mark :
A homeless wind drove over her soul,
And smote its candles dark.

THE BALLAD OF THE BITTER TREE

Then she went forth by stead and street,
And knew not night or day,
But knew the blind fate in her feet
Never could miss the way.

She found the ford, and asked not where,
She ate, and asked not how :
Strange lights were tangled in her hair,
And breaking in her brow.

She did not hear the children sing,
Nor the jackals yelp and cry :
She only saw a rigid thing
Stand black against the sky.

She saw a black and writhen shape,
Now clear, now wan'ing dim,
Whose arms, outspread, were wither'd and dead,
Yet beckon'd her and Him.

Then did there rise on her swimming eyes
A dome—a tower—a spire,
And the long heat did quiver and beat
And wash in a wave of fire.

She near'd the city gate at last,
And knew not voice or stare ;
She ask'd no help of the folk that pass'd,
And yet they whisper'd, " There ! "

THE BALLAD OF THE BITTER TREE

So did she know the Cross and stand—
 The midmost cross of three—
So drop like a stone each heavy hand,
 And sink beneath the tree.

She felt the fibre rend and part
 With the pains of clutching Hell :
She felt a heart break in her heart,
 And then the darkness fell.

THE MAN WHO CAME

There came a man in the deep night,
And stood by my bed :
Still he stood in the moon's light,
And no word he said.

The rats were scuttling in the wall :
I heard a gate creak :
The man spoke no word at all,
And I could not speak.

I saw the dust on his shoon,
The ribbons at his knee :
His face was full in the flood o' the moon,
A strange face to see.

I did not feel my flesh creep,
Nor a wind stir my hair,
Yet knew I well, awake or asleep,
No thing of blood was there.

Three o'clock was chiming slow
When his eyes took mine :
I heard the little quarter go
As he turn'd in the moonshine.

THE MAN WHO CAME

Twelve steps in a straight flight—

I heard his foot on all,
Light, light, sharp and light,
As a leaf's fall.

I rose, and set the sash wide :

I heard the ivy shake :
I counted the sheep in the dew deep,
And knew I was awake.

I said, "I do not ken the man,
And yet he comes to me
To tell he died in the night-tide,
About the stroke of three."

I said, "The like was never told,
That a soul should fleet,
Or ever the flesh it loved was cold,
To stand at strange feet."

I said, "It is to blood and kin
The new ghost hies,
Yet my house he enters in,
And looks with those eyes."

Then did I wait—wait—wait,
Hearkening for the knock
Should tell at last what soul had pass'd
At three of the clock.

THE MAN WHO CAME

I saw the ribbons at his knee,
The dust on his shoon ;
Strangely did he gaze at me
In the shine of the moon.

But twelve years have crept or sped,
And no word or sign :
Why did he stand beside the bed,
With his eyes on mine ?

THE PITY OF ALLAH

Over the vault of the world and the planets, the radiant
seven,

Struggled a fierce blind cry to the mansion of rapture
and rest ;

It broke in a fire-bright spume on the floor of the glory
of Heaven,

It caught like drowning hands at the raiment of
Allah the blest.

Tho' it came from the ultimate deeps, from the dumb
and the fathomless distance,

The pain at its passionate heart no distance could
deaden or quell :

It clung as the tongue of a flame that drinketh the might
of resistance,

It startled the rose-bright lawns with the hiss of the
horror of Hell.

It grew to a human voice, and the white souls, wondering,
hearken'd ;

The blooms of their bowers were burn'd, their
rivers and wells were defiled :

Their gold-hung odorous lamps were blown in its breath
and were darken'd ;

It cried, " O Father, remember : Thou madest the
mother and child.

THE PITY OF ALLAH

“Thou gavest a son to my shame : I died : in Gehenna’s
abysses—

The flames that are even a cry, the cry that arises
in flame—

I moisten’d the lips of my heart with the thought of
the dew of his kisses,

I made me a greenness, a bower, with the sound of
his innocent name.

“And now in the gulfs of Gehenna the voice of his
fever hath found me ;

He cries from the earth to the Hells, ‘O mother,
come here to my bed :

Mother, I want your hands to gather the linen around me :
I want your hands for my brow, and your bosom to
pillow my head.’

“Grant me to go to him, Allah, for have we not named
Thee as Father ?—

Grant me to be with my child, where he tosses, and
dwindles, and cries,

Till I feel on the drouth of his brow the moisture re-
deemingly gather,

Till daisies that close in the rain are his eyes and
the lids of his eyes.”

Then lifted the star of her face our Lady, the merciful
Mother :

She spake : “I have proved it and known, child-
travail, its rapture and pain :

Grant her to go to her child, for it never will rest for
another :

Appoint her a time to return, and to bathe in her
torment again.”

THE PITY OF ALLAH

They turn'd for the judgment of Allah : they look'd for
a word to be spoken ;

In nowise gesture or word to his chiefs and his
councillors fell :

Sadly arose Saint Peter, and, lifting his hands for a token,
He spake to the prayer, " Fall back to the gulfs and
the gulleys of Hell."

Torn from the merciful Feet, which it clasp'd in a
passionate clinging,

It dragg'd at the heart of the stars as they pulsed
in their rapturous zone :

Twilight gather'd in Heaven : there neither was viol nor
singing—

The lights of the rainbow paled that hung in the
rays of the Throne.

Stooping his head, one look'd from the height of the
samite pavilions,

Down thro' the crystalline hush, the void that was
heavy and stark :

Down thro' the suck of the suns and the march of the
stars in their millions,

To the deep where the furnace of Hell was a streamer
of red on the dark.

He spake as he turn'd his ear : " Behold, from Gehenna
the city

There breaketh no longer a surge as of spirits that
riot or wail :

Pass'd in his pain is the child, and their faces are melted
with pity :

Their tears fall thick on the fire, and the flames of
their punishment fail."

THE PITY OF ALLAH

Then he look'd where the throne of the Hells burn'd red, like a jewel of splendour :

On Satan's sword-bright scorn was a softness that gather'd and fell :

He look'd to the throne of the Heavens : the eyes of Lord Allah were tender :

A tear-drop glisten'd and broke, and hung like a moon over Hell.

And the reek of Gehenna was roll'd in a soft iridescent expansion,

As clouds that have gather'd the sun when the breezes awake and carouse :

They floated in fleeces of light to Allah's majestical mansion :

They clung in a nimbus of gold to Allah's ineffable brows.

And, lo, as the seabirds rise, white wings that cannot be counted,

Up from the gulleys of Hell, the gulfs of unplummeted woe,

The shapes of the lost that were saved in a luminous ecstacy mounted,

And whiten'd the Garden of God, a dream and a wonder of snow.

Then out of the rampart of pearl went Allah, a welcome before Him,

And Satan, ascending the stair, beheld Him, and fell on his knee :

But Allah had lifted him up ere yet he had time to adore Him :

“ Nay, we are brothers,” He said : “ henceforward thou reignest with Me.”

THE PITY OF ALLAH

Then spake Lord Allah, "Amen: lo, here in eternal
effacement
I blot out Hell from the book: as a leaf it has drifted
away:
Ye have seen two drops of the rain that twinkle to one
on a casement:
So Heaven and Hell in our tears have touch'd and
are mingled for aye."

A SOUL SHUT OUT

One night I knew that the soul had pow'r,
And the flesh wore thin :
I knew that hour was the granted hour
The gates to win.

For the strange lost colours dawn'd and pass'd,
The great moon glow'd,
And I saw the ineffable trees at last
That roof the road.

Each leaf was a lamp : each quivering bole
Was a pillar of flame :
On every tree some sword-bright soul
Had carven its name.

“ I will go to my past : I will sojourn,” I said,
“ Where my joys abide : ”
I left my body upon the bed,
And journey'd wide.

There spread before me, silent, immense,
A glimmering shore,
Where yet I knew by a secret sense
I had been before.

A SOUL SHUT OUT

And hidden things—I knew not what—
Would traverse the space ;
A scent remember'd, a thought forgot,
An imagined face.

Then, clear and true, were a bridge of wood,
And a twilight sky ;
A place where I thought my dreams had stood
In the years gone by.

A star came out : it leapt in the sky,
And shook in the stream :
I said, “ I was here in the lives gone by,
And not in a dream.”

Yet surely I had not coveted this
When I left my clay,
But the clearer life and the nearer bliss
Of a dearer day.

I wanted each kind familiar thing
That was real and mine,
When the thrush had not forgotten to sing,
And the sun could shine.

But more than all gifts the years confer,
And that cannot abide,
I wanted my mother—I wanted her—
My mother who died.

A SOUL SHUT OUT

Yet—now that the body was no more I,
 But I was a Will ;
That thought was presence, and far was nigh,
 And time was still—

I drew not to me the homely place
 Where my haven should be :
I could nor gather the blessed face
 That was half of me.

I seem'd as one urged thro' halls unsolved
 On a nightmare quest,
Where all is obstructed, all involved,
 And nothing at rest.

There was that which refused me—thrust me back ;
 There was that which drew :
Then greyness filter'd into the black,
 And at last I knew.

The feet of my longing had wander'd not—
 Behold, I was there !
Here it had stood—on this very spot—
 My mother's chair.

Strange faces flicker'd, hostile and hard,
 With a misty gleam :
A jangle of voices faintly jarr'd
 In a fretful dream.

A SOUL SHUT OUT

“Mother,” I call’d, “wherever you be,
A touch—a sign !”

And a wave of estrangement cover’d me :
I drank its brine.

I crept to her grave in a cold despair,
And whisper’d, “Come” :
There was not a daisy that knew her there,
And the night was dumb.

I stretch’d my hands to the glooming sky,
Strong hands that drew :
There was nothing in Heaven that made reply,
Nothing that knew.

Therewith I felt on an icy gust
A tempest arise,
And it seem’d that my dead in a bitter dust
Were blown on my eyes.

Time had not spared me even a sod
Where a tear might fall :
It had gather’d my love, my hope, my God,
And scatter’d them all.

Over the drown’d and swallow’d shore
Of my long-ago
I must wheel and cry for evermore
In a homeless woe.

A SOUL SHUT OUT

I said, "I will go where in sleep like death
My body lies :
I will give it once more the stir of my breath,
The light of my eyes.

"I have moved in my flesh as a clean man moves
In a sty of swine :
Its wants, its prayers, its horrible loves,
Never were mine.

"In a leper's clout I must deaden and drape
My visions of flame :
My flesh is one with the goat and the ape,
Except in its shame.

"But now that my past has broken away,
As a cliff in the foam,
I will get me back to my hovel of clay :
I will make it my home.

"I will dwell like a mate with my meat and drink,
And the warmth they breed :
I will be as my flesh, and I will not shrink
From its foulest need.

"I thought to inherit the earth," I said,
"And the stars of the dome :
The blood-and-mud that I left on the bed
Is my only home."

A SOUL SHUT OUT

I sought my body upon the bed,
And, behold ! a change :
Two eyes were set for lights in the head,
And the lights were strange.

An alien soul was in keeping there !
I utter'd a cry :
The strange eyes turn'd in a drowsy stare,
And pass'd me by.

I beat at the breast as one beats at a door
That the wind blows to :
I implored as wights in the rain implore
For entrance thro'.

The linen moved with the tranquil breast
In its fall and rise :
Dreams that I knew not gather'd and press'd
The soft-shut eyes.

I smote with my hand in the folded face :
I wept : I scream'd :
The sleeper never moved in his place :
Sweetly he dream'd.

“ My cries,” I mutter'd, “ would shake the dead
In the gulfs profound :
They are rolling and breaking about my head
In a madness of sound.”

A SOUL SHUT OUT

I waited : it seem'd that a whisper stirr'd
Like a dead leaf's fall :
I shouted again, and hearken'd, and heard
Nothing at all.

I knew it was vain to chide or beseech :
I turn'd me thence :
Henceforth I had neither form nor speech
For the human sense.

I was lost as the bubble that children blow—
A shiver of sheen
That breaks and ceases, and none can show
That it once has been.

It is even so : on the laughter and tears
Of breathing men
I cannot compute what snow of the years
Has fallen since then.

For ever—for ever—I move without :
I cannot die :
I shall watch the faint last star go out
In the aged sky.

I come where crowds of my fellows be,
Ungreeted, unknown :
No wandering wing on a polar sea
Was ever so lone.

A SOUL SHUT OUT

I envy the life of the man forbid,
 And the living who lie
While the screws bite home in the coffin-lid,
 And cannot cry.

I have hover'd in hope at the misty break
 Of All Souls' Day,
When they tell of the spirits flake on flake
 Like the milky way.

I have not felt on the sleeping air
 A whisper spread :
If the hosts of the souls are marshall'd there,
 They are dumb as the dead.

Once only, when that my feet had pass'd
 To the haunts of old,
One sigh'd, "The summer is waning fast,
 And the nights grow cold."

That is my part, in the human tide,
 In the human fold,
That once when I pass'd a woman sigh'd,
 " The nights grow cold."

THE MYSTERY OF MASTER'S HILL

Three folds of mountain roll their storms
On lonely Master's Hill :
The wind goes by like a frighten'd horse ;
The elms are never still.

They toss a deadly rumour round
Of something done of old :
They hush a clinging horror up
That never shall be told.

Yet may you hear the startled hoofs,
And feel the rumour'd harm,
And turn you to a spot enisled,
And shelter'd by a charm.

A^rfair room with a balcony
Looks on a garden space,
And all the roses seem to climb
To kiss a rosy face.

What deathless perfume lingers here
To bring a laughing eye
And flutter'd lace that makes a nest
To let a billet lie ?

THE MYSTERY OF MASTER'S HILL

A dying man would hear the thrush
 Sing in his blood again,
And dream bright ringlets in the sun,
 And kisses in the rain.

Shut to the door—shut out the sun—
 Come from the guarded room :
Step to the silent corridor,
 The mildew and the gloom.

Hark how the elm-trees rumour now
 That something done of old !
Hark how they hush the horror up
 That never shall be told !

Oh, dreary is the corridor
 That fronts the sullen pass
Creeping to the sad courtyard
 Green with nettles and grass !

See how the mists begin to rise,
 Like ghosts in raiment chill,
That stretch their arms and draw the pass
 To merge with Master's Hill !

The silent room with the great bed
 Is where the Masters died :
Five times the skinny layers-out
 Have wrought at that bedside.

THE MYSTERY OF MASTER'S HILL

The room that ends the corridor
Is sunder'd by a screen :
God knows within that inner space
What ghastly deed hath been.

Over the heavy screen of wood
Two mouldering curtains meet,
Tatter'd curtains green and grey,
Falling to the feet.

Near to where the curtains part
In fringes green and grey,
Something that the fingers touch
Plucks the heart away.

A little hole bored in the screen
The fumbling fingers try,
A little lurking round of glass
Scarce bigger than an eye :

A little lurking round of glass,
A little watchful chink
That spies upon the inner wall,
A staple and a link.

There, where, perhaps, the bed hath stood,
Some stains the floor encrust :
Iron will make a stain like blood :
Call it the staple's rust :
And yet was iron ever wrought
That dropt so red a rust ?

THE MYSTERY OF MASTER'S HILL

The elm-trees from this gable-end
Lean back a little space :
Every elm that leans away
Seems a fearful face.

Hark, what stir of creeping sounds !
There ! and there again !
First a little whimpering cry,
Then a creaking chain.

And now again a creaking chain,
And then a smother'd cry !
Did something stare at the spyhole there,
And fill it like an eye ?

Come out and look on the sad courtyard,
Green with nettles and grass :
Do you hear the hoofs of a frighten'd horse
Beat up the misty pass ?
Do you hear the empty stirrups shriek
Into the silent pass ?

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

Eden is a pleasant park :
Bright the almond blows :
On either hand through a good land
A great water goes.

On the left hand by a yellow strand
Gihon singeth clear :
Gihon hath a merry word
Thoro' all the year.

On the right hand by a russet strand
Sets Euphrates flood :
River-horse and crocodile
Love the tawny mud.

If you trace Euphrates river
Thro' the marshes dim,
You shall reach the iron beach
Where dwell the Nephilim.

These are they that came by night,
Great of limb and sword,
And carried down to their fenced town
The daughters of the Lord.

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

Further in the mountain's root
Lieth Cain's land :
Fierce and stark, for a tribesman's mark,
They carry the red hand.

Turn and trace the river down
Thro' the great shade,
You shall find the monstrous kind
God never made.

Shagged with hair like ape and bear,
In scrapen holes they dwell :
Their little souls that whimper and squeal
Stick to the walls of Hell.

Eden lieth sweet and shut,
And girt with twelve towers :
Lady Eve might roam all day
And alway step on flowers.

In Eden Park are all great trees :
And there all fruit trees grow :
Each hath twelve manner of fruit,
Twelve of flowers also.

All the trees in Eden Park,
They gather in a ring
As men of might in the last fight]
Gather round their king.

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

Like a jewel in the ring
The Tree of Wisdom stands :
The like of that tree you shall not see
In all strange lands.

By day its fruit is golden pippins
Striped with rose bars :
And all the night, a marvellous sight,
Its fruit is golden stars.

The Tree of Life is held and hidden
Far from any track :
None may see that guarded tree—
The Seraphs turn you back.

Eve look'd out on a fair morning,
The time of blossom'd thorn,
But she was whiter than the tree,
And brighter than the morn.

All of gold was Eve's hair,
That smelt of nard spice ;
She trod upon it as she went
Thoro' Paradise.

Eve she saw a caravan
Southward travelling :
Fifty men that rode on camels,
Every man a king.

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

Lady Eve she hail'd the men :
“ Now whither do ye ride ? ”
“ To Bethel, fair Lady Eve,
On the world's cold side.

“ Five thousand years we took to travel
And suffer many a thing
Until we meet a Babe sweet
Shall be the world's King.”

“ Why will ye ride so far, so far,
And waste your strength away ? ”
“ We seek that King because of a thing
Befalleth here to-day.”

Lady Eve she turn'd about
With a wave of her hands ;
Her feet they stray'd where, pleasant of shade,
The Tree of Wisdom stands.

The little dove that sings of peace
On her shoulder lighted he,
And he flutter'd his wings to drive her back
From the fair Wisdom Tree.

Lady Eve she kiss'd the dove,
That fled away in fright,
When she was aware of a marvel there
Among the blossom bright.

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

She looked upon a quaint thing
That shifted green and gold,
And wound among the goodly branches,
Fold on splendid fold.

“ Now who be ye ? ” then question’d she,
“ Who gaze with jewell’d eyes,
And twine about the goodliest tree
In water’d Paradise ? ”

“ I come and go at my own will—
Of God I ask no leave—
And I am here to teach you wisdom,
Bright Lady Eve.

“ God made you of porcelain fair
And not of Adam’s loam ;
You shake the sun out of your hair,
Your limbs are flowers and foam.

“ You are fair and I am wise :
Knowledge springs of me,
And I am come to pluck you wisdom
Out of Wisdom Tree.”

“ But God,” said Eve, “ who walketh here,
Is jealous of that tree :
A thing call’d death he threateneth,
If the fruit pluckèd be.”

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

“ Nay, not death,” the snake saith,
(See how the fruit glows) :
“ But wisdom—wisdom, Lady Eve,
That only the snake knows.”

A fruit of the tree pluckèd he,
Fair of flake and rind :
Shimmering like a sunset sea,
Roll'd he down the shining tree
Wind on mailed wind.

O the great King Snake
Fold on burning fold :
O the wonder and the terror
Never to be told :

O the fruit, the strange fruit.
Gold, banded with rose !
O the wisdom older than God
Only the snake knows !

“ ‘Tis a fair fruit,” said Lady Eve ;
“ But what may wisdom be ? ”
“ I am Wisdom,” quoth the serpent,
“ Set your lips to me.”

Lady Eve she laugh'd and wept
As the snake took her eyes :
The eyes of the snake they seemed the lamps
That lighted Paradise.

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

The little dove he puff'd his feathers,
And fluttered round the tree :
The dogs they sat and lifted their heads,
A sad company.

She set her lips to the golden pippin—
Sharp and sweet was the taste :
Green and gold, in burning fold,
The snake was round her waist.

O the great King Snake,
And the fruit that glows !
O the wisdom older than God
Only the snake knows !

O the great King Snake,
Fold on burning fold !
O the rapture and the fear
Never to be told !

O the strange wild wine
Mingled rich and strong !
O the little deed done
That sets the world wrong !

Wisdom tree, it splits in three,
Gihon gurgles red :
The nettle springs round Eve's knee,
The dove drops dead.

LADY EVE AND WISDOM TREE

Through the brake the King Snake
Pushes his flat head ;
On the petals Lady Eve
Lieth as the dead.

In the rose petals Eve lies,
Hiding in her hair !
O the silence and the eyes—
The eyes everywhere !

Hark ! hark ! sheer and stark
The hard blows rain !
Hard they hammer at Eden-gate,
The red hands of Cain.

THE CALL

I heard a Voice that call'd my name when I dwelt by
the Euphrates :

“Come out from temple and market thou, and
follow a pillar of fire ! ”

I rose and left in the graven town my kin, my wealth,
my great ease ;

“Surely the Voice will bless me,” I said, “beyond
my dream of desire.”

I went afoot thro’ Canaan, with its heart of heather
honey ;

I fought for a well, I vow’d a vow, I rear’d a menhir
of stone :

Four angels loosed my sandals ; I bought me a grave
for money :

God made me His heir, but except that grave I
gat no land for my own.

Then came the Voice in a screaming gale, “Behold I
have made thee a father :

Arise and slay thine only son, and purchase a god-
like name.”

And I said, “To save the innocent life the Hosts of
Heaven will gather,”

But lo, his blood gush’d out on me and never a
pinion came.

THE CALL

Then toil'd I down to Egypt, my feet by hunger and
thirst borne,
And there I worshipp'd lowing gods, and gods with
apish eyes ;
I lived a leper, till God arose and smote all Egypt's
first-born,
And set me alone on the dreadful mount, and rent
the rocks and the skies.

Then sought I Greece, the little land, where every stone
is a story,
And lo ! the Voice became a charm to lull my soul
in dreams ;
My breath was like the breath of God, creating visions
of glory,
I sipp'd the honey of Plato's bees, I bathed in the
haunted streams.

I saw the white foam flower into flesh, and I knew it
for Aphrodite ;
She turn'd her head and whisper'd, "Come," and
I said, "The Voice at last !"
A thousand dovelike murmurs blent in a dreamy low
venite :
I woke and lo ! a cavern of bones, and all the Hells
went past.

THE CALL

Then was I drawn by a mighty star that shook like a
sword of splendour :

I talk'd with certain silly shepherds that told of a
marvellous thing ;

And while I fared with men whose bales had all the
East to render,

The winds and the waters folded their hands, and
the planets bow'd in a ring.

I knelt and adored, and my faith was flame, and signs
did follow and own me :

My touch enabled the palsied folk, the blind flock'd
round to see,

But one named Saul tore off his robe and call'd on the
crowd to stone me :

I lay for dead : and, behold ! the Voice : " Arise
and follow Me."

Then dwelt I certain silent years in the sand of the
Thebaid ;

My ration of meat was a score of peas ; my stripes
were ninety-and-nine ;

But under my heart (for I gaped in my sleep) twelve
fiends to my sore dismay hid :

I roll'd on my body and ground their bones, and
harried them into the swine.

THE CALL

Then did I light on an aged man enthroned in all dominion :

“ Ye wait to hear a Voice,” he said : “ ye look to behold a sign ;

But these be lights of Hell, my son, confounding self-opinion :

See how beneath His hand and seal the comfort of God is mine.”

Then led the Voice I know not whither amid the seers and the dreamers,

Yea, folk that held the stars in cups, the fates in flasks and globes :

Wild gods were theirs, and monstrous Christs, malign and mad Redeemers,

And idiot spirits that squeak’d in floors and gibber’d in charnel-robés.

I heard the Voice and I rose and found a little congregation

That met within a city-cellar to bless the Wine and the Bread,

And there I fain had worshipp’d and wrought with saints of a lowly station,

But again I heard the Voice in my ear : “ Come out from the men,” it said.

THE CALL

Clear spake the voice, "Too many are these, tho' ye
count them on all your fingers : "

It led my feet to a hovel of prayer where the folk
were only three.

"Lo, we are the saved," was the greeting they spake :
"and with us the Spirit lingers,"

But again the Voice, "Come out from these : too
many the people be."

I dwelt alone in the cell of my heart : the Voice !—
I arose and follow'd,

And found a meadow, lonely and still, with pink-
frill'd daisies drest :

And there in the lee of an upright stone a little house
was hollow'd ;

"Put off thy raiment," the Voice said low, "and
gather thy soul in rest."

And so I lie, and wot not well if I be awake or
dreaming ;

Only the Voice abides in the ground, and calls me
ever apart :

And all above my cover'd face a riot of worlds is
gleaming ;

I see the cycles open and shut like the beat of a
runner's heart.

THE CALL

The suns and systems wheel and dance like a dance of
gnats in summer ;
Wheel upon wheel, and spire on spire, they dwindle
fine and small :
In every star I look to stand, a seeking strange new-
comer,
And see a Hand that beckons Beyond, and hearken
a lonely call.

MY WIFE DIED

Laudanum ! clearly the wife had died
From a drench of the dreamy stuff,
Yet misadventure or suicide
Was hypothesis good enough :
But—written a day ere the thing befell,
Was a pencill'd diary note,—
With the sinister words, “ *My wife died :* ”—well,
They halter'd the preacher's throat.
At the inquest up to his pupilless eyes
He held the words, and a strange surmise
Grew dark in their gaze remote.
“ Often,” he said, “ I wish'd her dead,
And surely those words I wrote.
If I drugg'd her draught—which God forbid—
I did in a dream the thing I did : ”
The halter was round his throat.

He was a creature faint as a mist,
With hardly a touch on earth :
Her lips had the pout that must be kiss'd—
Coquette from her hour of birth :

MY WIFE DIED

Some word had been said of a lover of hers,
And the woman had lied and wept :
It was known—for the dreams that the drug confers—
 The laudanum flask be kept.
Matter enough for suspicion here,
But only suggestion—nothing clear,
 Till forward the diary leapt :
“ *My wife died* ”—yes, a sinister guess !
 And only excuse inept
Could meet that sentence rigid and dry,
That small deliberate prophecy,
 Foretelling the tryst she kept.

The preacher, gentle as a bird,
 Had neither regret nor fear,
As the chaplain murmur’d a broken word,
 And the last of his days drew near.
His fancies, faint and fugitive,
 Fell, glimmering, here and there,
And his eyes as lamps appear’d to live
 In the mist of his spectral hair.
“ Chaplain,” he said, “ if I ever unwind
These opiate tangles that mesh my mind,
 And the truth grows fixt and fair,
I will toss to you such hint or clue
 As people can throw from *There* : ”
Dreams in his eyes began to crowd :
“ Wherever *There* is,” he murmur’d aloud.
 “ At last I am nearly there.

MY WIFE DIED

“ The drug,” he said, “ wherefrom doth fall
 The soft Lethean spell,
That wraps the soul in a purple pall
 Spangled with Heaven and Hell :—
It shutters the doors where conscience waits,
 It digs at the will’s control :
Strange fears and hates it propagates
 In the echoing peopled soul.
I plotted nothing against her life,
My little shallow coquetting wife,
 Yet, under the drug’s control,
Those words I wrote that did devote
 Her unsuspecting soul :
Thank God, before she went to bed
Some tears of sorrow and grace were shed :
 I think they wash’d her soul.”

“ And yet,” he said—and the thought defined
 His vague and tremulous face—
“ If I could reach in my drifting mind
 Foothold or resting-place,
Those words wherein we saw the sin
 Of a pact and a purpose lie,
Might truly keep a drift less deep
 Than a murderous prophecy.
Prophecy—stop : it is coming : yes”—
Two fingers deep in his forehead press,
 His lips scarce hold the cry :

MY WIFE DIED

He lifts his hands : he rises and stands,
 He waits . . . and the light goes by :
“ No, no,” he murmurs, and bows his head,
“ *My wife died!* and I wished her dead :
 Surely I made her die.”

Next day he was led to the ugly place
 By the echoing vaulted way :
He flutter'd along with his filmy face,
 Like a light in the fog astray.
He shook the long hair back on his head,
 And a smile began to grow :
“ This all has happen'd before,” he said,
 “ Years and years ago.
I have walk'd on this gleaming red-tiled floor
On my way to the scaffold years before—
 How many I do not know :
That bell—that bell—I know it well,
 That bell so dreary and slow :
Well, I suppose it had to be,
For I heard it tolling a knell for me
 Years and years ago.”

“ Think,” said the chaplain, “ where you stand :
 How quickly the moments pass :
How short and slim is the rillet of sand
 That runs in the awful glass.”

MY WIFE DIED

He turn'd on the chaplain his wilder'd smile :
“ Why reckon it grain by grain ?—
I was here before—in a little while,
 Perhaps, I shall come again.
I *will* return if return I can :
There are riddles that lie in the egg of man
 It were worth some lives to explain :
Do we come by choice, or without a voice ?
 Is the mind no more than a brain ?
Are we bound to the wheel, or are we free ?
Is God upon it, as well as we ?—
 I will ask when I come again.”

On did the grim procession tread :—
 Like a runner, with roaring breath,
“ In the midst of life,” the chaplain read,
 “ Behold, we are even in death.”
Calmly the preacher took his stand
 On the floor of the death-trap grim :
Happy, adroit, with an artist’s hand,
 The hangman pinion’d him.
Then, ere the covering o’er them drew,
 A luminous look, swift, final, new,
 Flash’d out on the features dim :
A moment’s while there twinkled a smile
 To puzzle the seraphim :
He murmur’d a word, “ *Ezekiel !* ”
Like a pantomime trick the smart bolt fell,
 And ended or mended him.

MY WIFE DIED

“ *My wife died!* ”—sentence deadly and small—

It pulsed in the chaplain’s head :

It glimmer’d and glow’d on his study-wall,

Like the writing that Daniel read.

All night he woke from a snatching sleep

To the boom of that iron bell,

And a word like a snake thro’ his brain did creep—

The whisper, “ Ezekiel.”

At last, with a snap, to a single line,

The sunder’d words he saw combine.

And over him horror fell :

Down stairs he stole, like a haunted soul,

A riddle of death to spell.

The Holy Book from the shelves he took,

And he turn’d the leaves, with hands that shook,

Till he found Ezekiel.

Roughly he rattled the pages o’er,

With haste and with lingering dread :

He paused upon chapter twenty-four,

And hardly for fear he read :

“ Forbear to cry : bind on thy tire,

And cover not thou thy lips : ”

Then flash’d a line like a jag of fire

That rushes from black eclipse :—

‘ I spoke to the people at noon, and lo !

At even *my wife died* ”—even so :

Poor lover of Lethe-sips !

He had noosed his throat *with a sermon note*,

And had swung for his memory’s slips.

MY WIFE DIED

The chaplain sank in his study-chair :
The preacher had toss'd him a clue from *There*,
 With a smile on his wandering lips :
The chaplain saw—quaint, dreamy, dim—
A smile that flower'd from the heart of him,
A smile that puzzled the seraphim,
 Run over his eyes and lips.

THE WOMAN

Lord Allah made a woman
As beautiful as Heaven ;
And none would turn to look at her
But poor folk six or seven.
The Serpent made a woman
As beautiful as Hell :
Lo, all the Planets worshipp'd her
The four archangels fell,
Red Michael, Gabriel bright-hair'd,
Raphael, Uriel.

THE BLESSING

Down the lane together slowly, he and she,
With hearts that swoon to music, and eyes a mist of love :
“ Oh, what is the sweet sound murmur’d in the tree ? ”
 “ The dove, dear heart, the dove !
The dove, dear heart, the pretty, pretty dove
 That fills the woods of May :
He murmur’d in the flow’r of the trees of Eden bow’r,
 And he blesses us to-day.”

Up the lane together, slowly, he and she,
With fearful eyes averted, and hearts too wide awake :
“ Oh, what are the red eyes burning in the tree ? ”
 “ The snake, poor girl, the snake !
The snake, poor girl, the merry, merry snake
 That loves the warmth of May,
He sported for an hour in the trees of Eden bow’r,
 And he blesses us to-day.”

MY ISLAND

There's a green island
In a pansy bay,
Where the gold hair shines
That here is turn'd gray :
Where the faded bosom
Keeps its warm snows,
And the lost dimple
Comes and goes.

There I take refuge,
When the leaves fall,
And the sun creeps up
With no heart at all.
When my kin are strangers,
And work comes not right,
I row to my island
To spend a day and night.

There the sweet words are
Time hath stricken dumb :
There the deep words are
That would never come.

MY ISLAND

All the dead walk there—
All the dear dead :
Hands come out to meet you,
Good tears are shed.

There's a foam of faces,
A light of lost eyes :
Little, little things come back
With a dear surprise.
The shadow of a brown curl
Makes the tears start :
The tying of a little bow
Breaks the heart.

There the foil'd sculptor
Sees his white dream stand,
Sure and sweet as Eve stood
Warm from God's hand.
There the halting poet
Hears his heart's refrain
Laugh'd down the wheat-field,
Danced by the rain.

Ah, what songs one hears there !
Ripe to the core,
Older than the stars are,
Songs for evermore.
Ah, what lighted visions—
Shimmer of washing streams ;
God ! what trees, what colours,
What wisdom of dreams !

MY ISLAND

All the dead walk there—
All the dear dead :
Hands come out to meet you,
Good tears are shed.

There the one woman
Lets her heart be seen ;
She who is for ever,
And nowhere has been.

Ah, they come ! the lovers,
In a wonder slow,
Drawn across the day and night
Ages ago.

Look ! they move together,
Pale, with lingering feet,
But the stars are righted
When their lips meet.

Oh, the young hearts there,
Here so worn and old !
Oh, the warm lips there,
Here so thin and cold !
All the fruits are ripe there,
All the dreams possess'd :
Every woman's head there
Finds its heart's rest.

Oh, to see the soft light
Shine in dull eyes,
Looking at their own heart
In a hush'd surprise !

MY ISLAND

Oh, to see the fair babe
 On each childless knee !
Oh, to see the warp'd world
 As it ought to be !

Don't you think an old rune
 Is little understood,
And my island was the world
 That God call'd good ?

MY NEIGHBOUR

I cannot fathom her story,
Her rank I cannot define,
Yet only the slenderest railing
Partitions her house from mine.

Some think her a tradesman's widow,
And some an exiled queen,
And some a little adventuress,
False and cruel and mean.

None sees her driving or walking,
She has not a friend in town ;
No smoke goes up from the chimneys,
And ever the blinds are down.

Ah, but she has her callers ;
Not seldom a coach and four,
With a queue of gapers and gazers,
Will stop at my neighbour's door.

There enters a quiet person,
Too simple for such display,
Who travels with little luggage,
Yet comes for a lengthen'd stay.

MY NEIGHBOUR

And thence arises a question
That troubles the gossip's heart :
Do the callers leave in the night-time ?
For no one sees them depart.

There must be ugly surmises,
There must be wonder and doubt—
If only the door would open
To usher one traveller out !

So strange is the brooding silence,
So little is guess'd or known
Of the house and its silent comers
Shut in the crowd alone.

The boys who peep at the key-hole
Tell tales to their hearts' desire :
A fool has listen'd to music,
A drunkard run from a fire.

We hear with a shrug of the shoulder,
And yet we rise and stand
To question the house of silence
That glooms so near at hand.

The portal is low and narrow :
The stone is heavy and gray :
A dead yew darkens the window :
The senses gather decay.

Its plan is a mere conjecture,
So strangely the creepers grow :—
The door a definite blackness,
Shadows above and below.

MY NEIGHBOUR

Some mutter of ancient cellars,
 Of chains and of dungeon-bars,
Some murmur of wonderful stairways
 Open to wind and stars.

Some whisper of glorious chambers
 Unfolding for evermore ;
Some say you fall on a dustheap
 The moment they shut the door.

And so we gossip and question
 With wonder for ever young,
And our quiet perplexing neighbour
 Frigidly holds her tongue.

The bell has an easy handle,
 But here is a curious thing :
All of us gape and loiter,
 Nobody cares to ring.

* * * * *

The door has open'd a moment
 To shut on a man I love :
Oh, for a voice in the passage !
 A light in the room above !

I gaze on the shutter'd windows :
 The dead leaves flutter and fall :
Oh, what of the dreadful neighbour
 Who lives nextdoor to us all ?

A SPECIAL COLLECTION

The corporal with a dozen men was working up a drill,
When up there limps a general, and watches from the hill :
And "Very pretty, boys," he shouts, "and you're the
Blanks, I see :
And, where's Tim Clancy, corporal, that fought along
o' me ?"

"I'll fetch him, sir," the corporal says, "the
church . . . ain't far from here :"
And brings him with his red moustache yet dark with
dropping beer.
"Well, Clancy," says the general, returning Tim's
salute,
"When last I saw your ugly mug, 'twas blacker than
your boot.

"And do you feel the wound at all you got that after-
noon ?"
"There's bits o' bone works out," says Tim, "at changes
o' the moon :
I hope your Honour has your health, and wouldn't
find the lead
Not incommodious at all a-knocking round your head ?"

A SPECIAL COLLECTION

And then they fought the war again, improving on the plan :

And Joubert was a gentleman, and Cronje was a man :
But Tim had this against the Boers (he own'd their shooting good),

They didn't take the bay'net "home" as nateral as they should.

"God bless us," says the general, "the bugle's singing tea :
Shake hands : I never felt the time, colloquing here so free."

He limps away, and Clancy clears a dimness from his sight :

Then, "With the help o' God," says he, "I'll do a drunk to-night."

"With sich a 'ard and season'd 'ead," says little Private Green,

"What would you think to do it for—respectable, I mean ? "

"Faith, mixing colours all the time, I'd hold me liquor down,

And not be drunk with decency inside o' ha'f a crown."

They took a small collection up, most business-like and grave,

And as the pigs had prosper'd him each pious Tommy gave :

'Tho' Temperance Tonks declined the cap, esteeming drink a snare,

They pick'd his pocket, and he shed a blessing unaware.

A SPECIAL COLLECTION

They held a meeting, urgent-like, within the new canteen :
Convener, Corporal Appleyard : Proposer, Private Green :
" The few select and undersign'd, assembled freely here,
In view of certain tender chords, not unconcern'd with
beer :

" Which honourable sentiments, harmonious to our
views,
We pledge ourselves unanimous to foster and contuse."
They handed Clancy three-and-six : he painted Chatham
red,
And, praising Heaven for duty done, they carried him
to bed.

THE BRIGHT SCAR

(*St. Louis, 1876. See Mr. Andrew Lang's "Dreams and Ghosts."*)

Around him, like a hurrying loom,
 He heard the city throb,
Gathering a million crossing lives
 Into a lonely sob.

He turn'd to blot the last letter,
 And knew that she was there :
Lucy, his little dead sister,
 Was leaning over his chair.

'Twas Lucy, with her eighteen years,
 In soft white raiment clad :
It seem'd to him she never had died,
 And all his heart was glad.

One arm lay out along the table ;
 The fingers lightly beat ;
He felt the gray dance of her eyes
 Before their looks could meet.

THE BRIGHT SCAR

Yet somewhere in their netted light
He thought a sorrow lay :
A tear, he thought, was almost ready
To shine and swim away.

“ Lucy,” he said, “ my little sister !
Oh, Lucy, are you come ? ”
He stretch’d his arms to gather her,
And heard the traffic drum.

He heard the racing loom of the city,
He saw nor form nor face,
Yet felt the smile that drew his heart
Still warm the empty place.

He held his eyes like a swerving horse :
He forced their sense to see :
“ Lucy is dead,” he whisper’d at last :
“ Her spirit came to me.

“ And yet ’twas Lucy as she work’d,
Or sang upon the stair :
I saw the curve of her yellow comb,
A moon in her twilight hair.

“ I saw the gray dance of her eyes :
Her lips grew kind to speak : ”
He paused and mutter’d, “ The scar . . . the scar !
There was a scar on her cheek.

THE BRIGHT SCAR

“ Half down the soft round of her cheek,
 Where the little freckles are,
There ran, like the vein in a marble slab,
 A bright and clear-drawn scar.

“ She has made the stars her stepping stones ;
 She has won the immortal birth ;
Yet her heavenly flesh is seam'd with a scar
 That never it knew on earth.”

He touch'd the place where her arm had lain,
 Where tapp'd her fingers slim ;
Almost he look'd to find a glove,
 Or a written word for him.

Then did his wonder close and clasp,
 Leaving no thought ajar
But the tender curve of her April cheek
 Cut with the clear-drawn scar.

He pass'd into the roaring street,
 And sat in the screaming car,
And all the race of the marshall'd worlds
 Had shrunk to a little scar.

He reach'd his home, and sat at the table,
 And ate the food that came,
And felt the eyes that question'd him,
 And never spoke her name.

THE BRIGHT SCAR

Then, rising, with a nod he pass'd
To his chamber overhead :
His mother's feet were hard behind :
" Son, tell me all," she said.

" Mother, I meant to keep it hidden,
Yet was I sure you knew : "
" Her eyes," she said, " look'd out from yours,
She seem'd to breathe in you.

" To you she came, and not to me !
Wherefore was it she came ?
Oh, William, is she happy in Heaven,
And are her looks the same ? "

Their grieved eyes drew together and stood :
An engine scream'd afar :
Slowly the mother sank on the bed :
" My God ! you saw the scar ! "

" You knew of the scar ! " he whisper'd back :
" That mark a nail might tear !
Mother, I kiss'd her in her shroud,
And no bright scar was there.

" She lay below the tall candles,
With hair that did not stir :
I thought the soft light dreaming round
Came not from them but her.

THE BRIGHT SCAR

“ She dwindled to her little feet,
As if a flame were still :
She made me ashamed of the flesh I wore,
She lay so pure and chill.

“ She lay as in a world unfound,
Where time has never trod :
I knew she wanted nothing now
Either of us or God.

“ She gather'd up some elder peace,
Lonely, royal, right :
I thought no fear for evermore
Could vex us in the night.

“ But when she came to-day, Mother,
No sovereign calm she wore ;
She was my little loving sister,
Sadder than of yore.

“ I saw the gray dance of her eyes :
Her lips grew kind to speak :
I turn'd to kiss her, and the scar—
The scar was on her cheek.”

The mother's pain gather'd no tears,
Hardly a sob would rise,
But all the roots of life were loosen'd :
She changed under his eyes.

THE BRIGHT SCAR

She touch'd her hair with fretting hands ;
 Her voice was thin and far ;
Her eyes were little frighten'd lamps
 Roll'd where the breakers are.

“ Oh, William, I must go to her :
 William, I cannot stay ;
I want to cry before the Throne,
 ‘ Lord, touch the scar away ! ’

“ I doubt death changes us but little :
 Sorely her heart is vexed :
A woman is a woman still
 In this world and the next.

“ ’Twas in the last night, William ;
 The gray began to stir :
I rose to sit beside her coffin
 Before they came for her.

“ She was all folded like a flower—
 Hands and limbs and face ;
I would not let my tears touch her ;
 I stoop'd to order the lace.

“ My sapphire brooch was pinn'd at my breast,
 And pinn'd with little care ;
I order'd the lace, I whisper'd her name,
 I rose—and It was there.

THE BRIGHT SCAR

“ She carried it under the coffin-lid,
And under the spaded sod :
It mars the tender face that bows
To have the peace of God.

“ Oh, William, I must go to her ;
William, I cannot stay :
I want to cry before the Throne,
‘ Lord, smooth the scar away ! ’ ”

He gave her words of halting comfort ;
Idly he heard them roll ;
He saw across a wide water
The scared lights of her soul.

Thenceforth she dwelt recluse, remote ;
On her no chance might fall ;
Her thin hands hearken’d as she sat
To catch the lonely call.

In the fourth week it came to her ;
Bright as a bride she lay ;
They whisper’d, “ God has done her right,
And touch’d the scar away.”

THE BALLAD OF BETHLEHEM

King Jesus hearken'd on His throne
Above the sunset skies ;
Around Him in a burning zone
He felt the pray'rs arise :
It seem'd a million million hearts
Were pour'd in litanies.

He turn'd him to the bright Saint John :
“ The tide flows full and strong.
Ye see, all lands are praying hands,
And lips that cry ‘ How long ? ’
Hearken ! again that wail of pain,
‘ Lord, save Thy church from wrong.

“ Behold, we stand with girded loins :
Our patient lamps we trim :
Two thousand years we gaze thro’ tears
With faith that grows not dim :
Redeemer, let Thy judgment cloud
Across the midnight swim.’ ”

THE BALLAD OF BETHLEHEM

He said, "The airs of Paradise
Are salt with human tears :
The sighs that roll from pole to pole
Blow faint the starry spheres :
I come, I come, my Christendom,
To reign the thousand years."

He stept upon the golden cloud
That waited at His feet :
Back, like a station's threaded lights,
He saw the planets fleet :
He knew once more an earthly shore,
He trod a London street.

He saw the leagues of windows flare,
The leagues of lamps afame :
He said, "In all their halls of pray'r
Thy call upon My name.
It was not so long years ago,
When as a child I came."

He saw a thousand tangled lights
In floating glory steer :
It seem'd to Him each flame of God
Was made his proud courier :
"They speed to all the lands," He said,
"They cry, 'The Lord is here !'"

THE BALLAD OF BETHLEHEM

Thro' lights and shades of fair arcades
 He saw the women go,
With lifted skirt that took no hurt
 In whispering to and fro,
And, watchful eyes turn'd cornerwise,
 And steps devoutly slow.

He said, " Your lamps burn clear and strong,
 And, tho' the night was deep,
And tho' the Bridegroom tarried long,
 Ye would not nod to sleep :
Wise Virgins ye, in chastity
 Your patient watch that keep."

Then from a column'd portico,
 With changing brilliance crown'd,
Sudden there broke a crowd of folk,
 With all tumultuous sound,
And somewhat less He bade them press,
 And compass Him around.

He said : " Beside my Father's throne,
 I felt your raining tears :
I felt your sighs in storms arise
 To quench the starry spheres ;
Lo, I am come to Christendom
 To reign the thousand years."

THE BALLAD OF BETHLEHEM

Then laughter broke : He turn'd and spoke :
 " Ah, Thomas, art thou there ?
And hast thou trod all lands of God,
 Swept by the old despair ?
Thine hand thrust out and slay the doubt :
 Behold the wounds I bear."

The white-lit faces darken'd now,
 The cries were fierce and thick,
And one drew near and smote His brow
 That all the lamps grew sick :
Then some one spoke among the folk,
 " The man is lunatic."

They led Him thro' a gate apart,
 And bade Him have no fear :
" Poor Christ, in Bethlehem thou art :
 Thine hostelry is here :
Thou shalt have food and tendance good
 Until thy wits be clear."

There doth He bide from tide to tide,
 With kings from many lands,
And orators and counsellors
 Whom no man understands,
And shows, with seven other Christs,
 The nail-prints in His hands.

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